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Chairman: Mr. Galuška ..... (Czech Republic)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 111: Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions (*continued*) (A/54/12 and Add.1, A/54/91, 98, 99, 285, 286 and 414)

1. **Mr. Jovanović** (Observer for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)) said that humanitarian law was all too often flouted, with the targeting and displacement of civilian populations in situations of armed conflict. Acts of violence committed against humanitarian organizations increasingly hampered their access to victims. The International Committee noted with satisfaction the recent initiative taken by the Security Council to better protect civilians affected by armed conflict and the related report of the Secretary-General contained in document S/1999/957. In keeping with its mandate to promote the application of international humanitarian law, ICRC reminded parties to conflicts of their duty to respect and protect all civilians.

2. During the twenty-seventh Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent held recently at Geneva, ICRC, national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, and their International Federation had expressed deep concern for, and their determination to defend, the victims of displacement. The Conference had adopted a Plan of Action calling on all parties in situations of armed conflict to avoid measures that could provoke population displacement, and to ensure respect for, and protection of, displaced persons. The Plan of Action urged respect for the civilian status of refugee and internally displaced persons' camps, calling for the safe and voluntary return of displaced persons or their voluntary resettlement elsewhere. It also called on each component of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement to extend greater support to States providing protection and assistance to refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced persons, and to promote solidarity and understanding between those groups and their host communities.

3. **Mr. Salinas** (Chile) introduced draft resolution A/C.3/54/L.57, by which the General Assembly, pursuant to Economic and Social Council decisions 1999/207 and 2082, would decide to enlarge the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees by three members, to be elected in 2000. The three sponsors of the draft resolution — Chile, Côte d'Ivoire and the Republic of Korea — would be interested in putting forward their candidacies for the three additional vacancies. For more than a decade, Côte d'Ivoire had admitted to its territory over 120,000 refugees and, with international assistance, accorded them model living accommodations; as a member of the Executive Committee it would be able to share that experience.

4. The Republic of Korea had contributed over 10 times more to the Programme since 1997 than it had five years earlier, and during its presidency of the Security Council in 1997 it had initiated a debate on protection for those providing humanitarian assistance to refugees and others; its genuine concern for refugee issues would make it a valuable member of the Executive Committee. Chile, which had for 200 years been recognized as a land of asylum for refugees from all parts of the world, had in 1999 undertaken its first refugee resettlement programme under an agreement signed with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; as a member of the Executive Committee, Chile would be in a position to cooperate even more closely.

Agenda item 116: Human rights questions (*continued*)

(b) Human rights questions, including alternative approaches for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms (*continued*) (A/C.3/54/L.61)

Draft resolution A/C.3/54/L.61: Elimination of all forms of religious intolerance

5. **Ms. Duffy** (Ireland), introducing draft resolution A/C.3/54/L.61, said that lack of tolerance was one of the root causes of conflict within and between nations. It was necessary to create conditions that fostered greater social harmony and tolerance. It was worrying that people in several parts of the world were denied their inalienable right to freedom of religion and belief. Individuals should be free even to change their religion, if their conscience so dictated. While some progress had been achieved, intolerance persisted and was widespread.

6. The interim report of the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the elimination of all forms of intolerance and of discrimination based on religion or belief contained in document A/54/386 had shown that intolerance was not the monopoly of any one State, religion, religious group or community. Discrimination and intolerance, particularly against women, could be found in many parts of the world. In severe cases, people had been subjected to systematic persecution, torture, summary execution or other coercive measures, solely on account of their religious beliefs.

7. There had been an alarming increase in cases of murder, assault and destruction of places of worship motivated by religious intolerance. Increasing discrimination against religious minorities was particularly worrying, while women suffered disproportionately from discrimination based on religion or religious traditions. Many other vulnerable groups were persecuted. All governments should take action to ensure respect for the rights of all ethnic and religious minorities. They should afford the Special Rapporteur their full cooperation, allowing him to carry out *in situ* visits in fulfilment of his mandate.

8. Education played an important role in combating and preventing intolerance. The work of human-rights defenders and non-governmental organizations was vital in that regard, helping also to highlight cases of intolerance and discrimination. Those considerations should be taken into account at the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance to be held in 2001, and the Special Rapporteur should participate in the preparatory process.

9. The international community should eschew complacency and work for greater freedom of religion or belief, fostering dialogue and seeking to achieve genuine pluralism, where tolerance of diverse opinions and beliefs would be strengthened. In that regard, her delegation hoped that draft resolution A/C.3/54/L.61 would be adopted by consensus.

Agenda item 109: Advancement of women (*continued*) (A/54/500)

10. **Ms. King** (Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW)), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on the new structure and working method of INSTRAW (A/54/500), said that the report reflected the concerns raised and suggestions put forward at the ad hoc meeting of donors and interested States Members to discuss the revitalization of the Institute and its immediate and long-term funding, held on 18 October 1999.

11. The report put forward a viable initial proposal aimed at expanding the information, knowledge and data needed for the advancement of women and the achievement of gender equality. The core functions of the Institute would rely primarily on new technologies, through the establishment of the Gender Awareness Information and Networking System (GAINS). The System would be a one-stop Web site with a database, networks, search capability and on-line forums. It would provide, *inter alia*, a gender-aware news service, a "good practices showcase", distance-learning materials and specialized information on gender-related issues. Governments, the United Nations system, non-governmental organizations, women's groups, intergovernmental and international organizations, individual women and men could all benefit from the System, which would facilitate distance learning, enhance communication and build dialogue through panel discussions and on-line conferences.

12. The proposed feasibility study, to be reviewed by the Board of Trustees, the Commission on the Status of Women and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), would flesh out technical aspects such as the configuration of the system, languages and the mix of staff and equipment required. The report responded to the Economic and Social Council's concerns about administrative anomalies and recruitment delays. In that regard, a review was being carried out of the amounts paid to staff members while on mission. Any outstanding funds would be placed in the INSTRAW Trust Fund. The backing of Member States for the revitalized Institute was fundamental. Voluntary contributions to the Trust Fund were needed to help INSTRAW provide good value for money and carry out gender-related research and training into the next millennium. In that regard, there would be funding for the Institute until at least June 2000.

13. **Ms. Tavares de Álvarez** (Dominican Republic) said that, as the host country for INSTRAW, the Dominican Republic had a special interest in the greater efficiency that would result from the new structure and working methods. It was pleased that operations would be based on new technologies and believed that the Technological Centre for the Americas and the industrial Cyberpark which her Government was setting up would be able to offer support for the Institute's new way of working. The Cyberpark in particular would provide facilities for scientific research institutions and for advanced computation and telecommunications technology enterprises.

14. It should be recalled, however, that INSTRAW had been founded to advance the participation of women in development and that, even at the eve of the new millennium, many regions lacked the technological structures that would give women access to an INSTRAW operational system that was entirely technologically based. It was therefore essential for the Institute to maintain its traditional information methods as well, even as it promoted the adoption of the new technologies in the areas that lacked them. As a developing country, the Dominican Republic was pleased to be the headquarters for the new operations. It supported the idea of the prior feasibility study, which would

include an evaluation of the existing facilities, presumably in consultation with her Government.

15. **Ms. Monroy** (Mexico) said that she agreed with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General that the revitalization of INSTRAW had to proceed on a solid basis, with a prior feasibility study to prepare the ground. Mexico supported INSTRAW because of what it was doing in the gender field for the United Nations and the region, and had already announced its voluntary contribution for 2000.

16. **Ms. de Armas García** (Cuba), stressing the importance which her Government attached to the work of INSTRAW, noted that the latest *Human Development Report* had indicated that only two per cent of the developing world had access to the Internet and that therefore the majority of women in the world were beyond its reach. Consequently, traditional methods must not be relegated to the past, but must be strengthened as INSTRAW moved into the new technologies, which would no doubt lead to improvements. She asked what steps were being planned to allow women in the developing world to share in those improvements.

17. **Ms. Stamiris** (Director, International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women) assured the representative of Cuba that reaching all the women in the world loomed very large among INSTRAW concerns. Even with its traditional methods, it had access to very few, usually those who could read. The worldwide availability of the Internet should not be underestimated. In 2000, 700 million users were anticipated, in comparison with only 140 million in 1998. INSTRAW was doing its best to get more women — especially in the developing countries — involved in the great cyber-conversation. How to do so would be one of the considerations of the feasibility study.

18. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), for instance, had an Intranet network in the developing countries, and INSTRAW hoped to use that mainstream network in order to communicate, in both directions with women. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) were also researching ways of reaching women through information technology. One major problem was that in countries which did have the Internet, only a very small proportion of the users were women. Thus, if the GAINS programme was approved, INSTRAW would be proactive in bridging that user gap.

19. With regard to the Dominican Republic, it was a developing country that was very amenable to the introduction of new technologies. The Government, for instance, had a forward-looking policy on the introduction of computers in the schools, and was establishing an interesting Cyber park. INSTRAW for its part would encourage women to use that technological facility.

20. **Ms. King** (Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women) thanked all who had spoken or who had worked behind the scenes in support of the proposed changes, and said that all would work together for the advancement of women in the new century.

The meeting rose at 4.05 p.m.